

Amendments to the Land Use Element

C-6 Transit Communities

Discussion

Reliable, frequent transit service provides a meaningful opportunity to cultivate livable, equitable, and connected “transit communities” across Seattle. The City can leverage local and regional transit investments by aligning and coordinating land use policies and public investment to foster the development of strong residential and business communities oriented around transit.

Transit communities are complete, compact, connected places that offer a sustainable lifestyle, generally within a ten-minute walk of reliable, frequent transit. Not all transit communities will be the same, and the policies anticipate different categories of transit communities that vary in scale and intensity of use. However, all transit communities will include the following characteristics:

- Complete: A variety of people will live, work in, and/or visit each transit community, depending on its category. The transportation infrastructure makes it easy and safe for pedestrians and bicyclists to travel to and within the area. Residents, workers, and visitors are able to obtain a variety of goods and services within transit communities, again varying by category.
- Compact: Transit communities are designed so that a large number of people and activities are located close to transit service, creating a critical mass of people and activity that encourages safe streets and public spaces, and provides services for the surrounding neighborhood.
- Connected: Transit communities are internally accessible and are connected to other transit communities by reliable, frequent transit service. People have increased mobility choices without need for a car.

While transit communities range in scale and intensity of use, on the whole they tend to be more compact and connected than the surrounding area. The goal is that people who live, work, or attend school in a transit community enjoy enhanced livability in the form of diverse housing types; car-free access to goods, services, and jobs; a comfortable, safe, and connected system for walking and bicycling; high quality open space; and distinctive neighborhood culture and diversity. These components of livability create vibrant, walkable, sustainable communities.

Transit communities provide environmental, economic, and social benefits to individuals and to the greater community, including healthy lifestyle choices, lower transportation costs, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and easy access to housing options, services, and jobs. In addition to informing priorities for City spending and land use planning, the transit communities policies can also support citywide goals for social equity and carbon neutrality.

Transit communities follow the core values and principles that guide this Plan. Since the adoption of this Plan and its urban village strategy in 1994, the region's investment in transit has grown to include commuter rail, light rail, streetcar, and bus rapid transit in addition to the bus and ferry systems that pre-dated the Plan.

By using "walkshed" methodology, the transit community policies provide a planning framework that focuses precisely on areas located near frequent transit service. This helps implement the urban village strategy, as well as other state and regional growth management goals. A walkshed is the distance that the average person is able to walk in ten minutes, which is about one-half mile. It is not mapped "as the crow flies", but using the existing street network. It also takes walking effort into account, since people will walk farther on level ground than on a steep slope, as well as the existence of barriers such as ravines or freeways. The boundary of a walkshed may be extended based on community input to include generators of pedestrian activity, such as a large employer or institution, business district, or light rail stations, which is nearby but does not meet the ten-minute walk criterion.

The urban village strategy will continue to be the central organizing principle for planning and distributing growth, and for setting priorities for infrastructure investments and land use planning efforts. Transit communities will not replace urban villages, and most transit communities will be located within urban villages and centers. However, they will not be located within Manufacturing and Industrial Centers, which are intended to be industrial job centers, and which by the nature of industrial land uses are neither complete nor compact.

Once designated, a transit community would be considered as an area where growth is expected, similar to an urban center or village. Transit communities may be located inside an urban center or village, straddle the boundary of an urban center or village, or in a few cases be completely outside an urban center or village. Location of a transit community partly within an urban center or village may serve as the basis for expanding or refining the boundaries of the urban center or village. In a similar way, a transit community located outside of a current urban center or village could be designated as a new urban village with an assigned growth target.

Through a planning process for establishing transit communities, the City would involve neighborhood stakeholders and seek their recommendations for refinements of transit community boundaries, designation of the transit community category, potential zoning and design guidelines changes, and investment needs and priorities.

Another part of the planning process for establishing transit communities is to identify the improvements that are needed to support the creation or enhancement of a complete, compact, and connected communities. These needs would be given priority when City investment decisions are made. For example, a transit community would be considered a high priority for sidewalk improvements that make it easier to access

frequent transit service. In addition, social equity factors in transit communities, including automobile ownership rates, low-income population, housing cost burden, physical activity rates, and diabetes and obesity rates, could be considered in setting public investment priorities. For example, in considering applications for Housing Levy funding for low-income housing projects, locations within transit communities could be given higher priority.

Transit community designations will ultimately be adopted as part of the Future Land Use Map in the Comprehensive Plan.

Goals

- LUG 60 Create transit communities that are complete, compact, connected places within easy walking distance of reliable, frequent transit that provides service to multiple destinations.
- LUG 61 Reduce dependence on automobile transportation and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by supporting transit communities.
- LUG 62 Increase the efficiency of frequent and reliable transit service by locating concentrations of jobs and residents nearby in transit communities, in order to implement the urban village strategy.
- LUG 63 To take advantage of high concentrations of jobs and residents, prioritize investments and infrastructure improvements in transit communities, as part of the urban village strategy.
- LUG 64 Provide opportunities for residents of transit communities to lower their cost of living by providing safe and convenient walking or transit access to employment, education, and goods and services to meet their daily needs.
- LUG 65 Seek to provide equitable access to frequent and reliable transit service, and to preserve opportunities for a broad cross-section of socio-economic groups, ethnicities, and household types to live and work in transit communities. Encourage targeted use of incentive zoning and other tools and resources to curb potential displacement from transit communities of low-income, special needs, immigrant, and refugee populations, as well as culturally significant institutions or businesses, due to price increases and development associated with new transit facilities and increased investment.

Policies

- LU270 Identify potential transit communities by determining the following types of transit nodes that are located outside of Manufacturing and Industrial Centers, where multiple destinations are easily and directly accessible via frequent and reliable transit service:

- 1) Light rail stations;
- 2) Places where two corridors that currently provide frequent transit service intersect, as shown in either red, orange, or yellow on the Frequent Transit Network map (Figure 4-1 in the Seattle Transit Master Plan), as updated to show actual 2012 frequent transit service levels;
- 3) Existing multimodal hubs and transportation centers shown in Figure 5-5 in the Seattle Transit Master Plan.

LU271 Once potential transit communities are identified according to LU270, apply the following two factors to determine whether these areas should be designated as transit communities. These factors will be weighted to recognize differences in the scale of the facilities that generate pedestrian trips and the magnitude of expected population and employment growth.

- 1) Existing land uses that generate pedestrian demand, which could include major employers such as hospitals and large office buildings; colleges and universities; community facilities such as libraries, parks, and community centers; retail and service uses; multifamily housing; and tourist and entertainment attractions such as the Pike Place Market and sports stadiums.
- 2) Population and employment forecasts. Forecasts of the amount and location of future jobs and housing units provide estimates of future pedestrian demand.

LU272 For areas that meet the transit community criteria in Policies LU270 and LU271, create proposed transit community boundaries that are generally within a ten-minute walkshed of the nodes described in LU 270. A walkshed is the distance that the average person is able to walk in ten minutes (about one-half mile), using the existing street network, taking into account walking effort and the existence of barriers such as ravines or freeways. A walkshed may include community-identified generators of pedestrian activity that are nearby but do not meet the ten-minute walk criterion.

LU273 Designate categories of transit communities that describe the different levels of activity, scale and type of development, and other characteristics, as a tool to support current and future planning efforts.

LU274 Identify stakeholders in proposed transit communities, including neighborhood, business, community, and nonprofit organizations, and involve them in refining the boundaries of the transit community, designating the transit community category, planning potential zoning and design guideline changes, and identifying investment needs and priorities. Involve existing organizations, councils, and networks where possible, especially in urban villages and urban centers.

LU275 Consider the integration of transit communities into urban center and urban village boundaries, in order to promote predictable growth patterns and set investment priorities that are consistent with the urban village strategy.

LU276 Prioritize and focus city investments in transit communities to provide affordable housing, transportation improvements, additional open space, and other needs that support complete, compact, and connected transit communities. Consider social equity factors including automobile ownership rates, low-income population, housing cost burden, physical activity rates, and diabetes and obesity rates in the prioritization process.